

Mary Todd Lincoln

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On December 13, 1818, Robert Smith Todd and Eliza gave birth to a daughter, Mary Ann. She was the fourth of seven children. The Todds lived in the South and owned a few slaves. Mary Ann's father was a lawyer, merchant, military officer (War of 1812), and a member of the Kentucky legislature. Mary Ann's mother, Eliza Parker, died while Mary was still young. Mary Ann's father, Robert Smith later remarried Elizabeth Humphrey.

When Mary Ann turned eight, she began attending Shelby Female Academy, later known as the Academy of Dr. John Ward. At the age of fourteen, she was sent to Madame Victorie Mentelle's Select Academy for Young Ladies. Later, Mary Ann moved to Springfield, Illinois, to live with her sister Frances. After three months, Mary came back to Shelby Female Academy for two more years.

Even though Mary Ann came from a wealthy background and was a very proper lady, she knew she was different from other girls and was destined for something more than a common housewife. She wanted a man in her life. She once said, "I would rather marry a poor man – man of mind – with hope and brightness, prospects ahead for a position, fame and power than to marry all the houses [of] gold." As an old adage goes "opposites attract." At a dance, in 1839, Abraham Lincoln walked into Mary Todd's life. It was love at first sight. It did not take long for Lincoln to propose. Mary Todd was a proper wealthy lady, while on the other hand, Lincoln was not a well-educated man nor was he wealthy. However, that did not seem to make a difference. Lincoln and Mary

married on November 4, 1842. Soon after they married, Mary gave birth to four sons, Robert, Edward, William, and Thomas. During his toddler years, Edward died of diphtheria. A year after Edward's death, Abraham's father, Thomas, died of a kidney ailment.

While Lincoln served as a Congressman for two years, Mary stayed at home to care for the family, clean, and cook. When Abraham began looking for a position in Congress, Mary wrote solicitation letters to Whig leaders.

Mary believed that one day she would be the wife of the President of the United States of America. Soon Abraham was elected president. On March 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was officially inaugurated.

The Lincolns moved into the White House after Lincoln was inaugurated. Living in Washington, D. C. was a hardship for Mary. When the South succeeded from the Union, Mary was criticized for holding costly festive events, which caused her to go over the budget set by Congress for the White House.

As the Civil War grew more violent and brutal, Mary began losing her family. Three of Mary Ann's half-brothers and a half-sister's husband died during the war. Around the same time, William, one of her sons, died of fever in 1862. William's death inspired Mary to visit hospitals, bringing gifts of food, books and letters for the soldiers, and raised \$1,000 for a Christmas dinner. Besides helping the soldiers, Mary also helped slaves by raising money to build better housing.

A year after, Abraham was re-elected. Five days later, Abraham was dead and Mary became very distraught. Mary left the White House and moved to Chicago, to join her remaining sons, Robert and Thomas. On July 15, 1871, Thomas passed away. It was

extremely difficult for Mary to deal with another death. Her mental health deteriorated quickly. She had delusions, hallucinations and became paranoid. Robert became concerned and on May 20, 1875, a jury declared Mary mentally insane and committed her to Bellevue Nursing and Rest Home of Springfield, Illinois. After improving, Robert, her only living son, worked hard for her to be released. Finally, she was released to her sister Elizabeth, and later redeemed her sanity. Her health was slowly declining due to undiagnosed diabetes, spinal arthritis, and migraine headaches. On July 16, 1882, at the age of 63, Mary Ann Todd Lincoln passed away.

Mary was known as a compassionate mother of four. The death of her children and husband drove Mary to the brink. Mary Todd was devoted to her husband, family, and the world, leaving a moral behind: she lived up to her dreams, and continued on her journey until she finally found peace. [From Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*; Randall Ruth Painter, *Mary Lincoln*; and Phillip B. Kunhardt, Phillip B. Kunhardt, III, and Peter W. Kunhardt, *Lincoln*.]